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Debs, Eugene Victor

Class unionism

[Chicago]

[1905]

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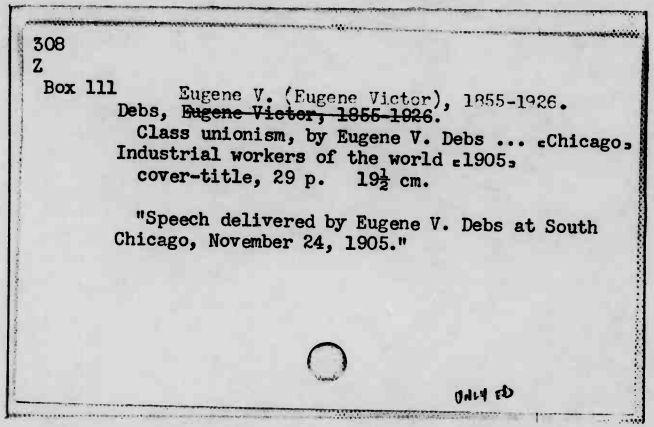
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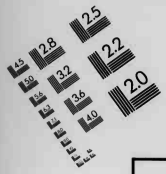

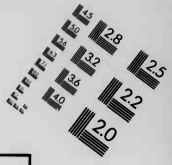

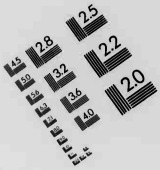

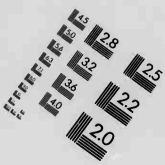

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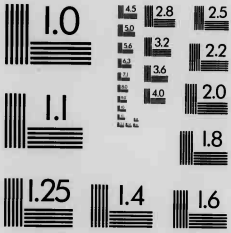

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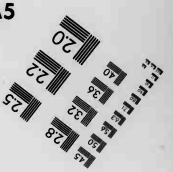

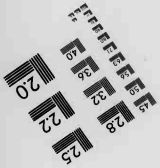

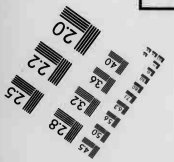

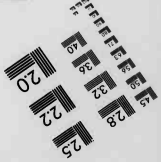

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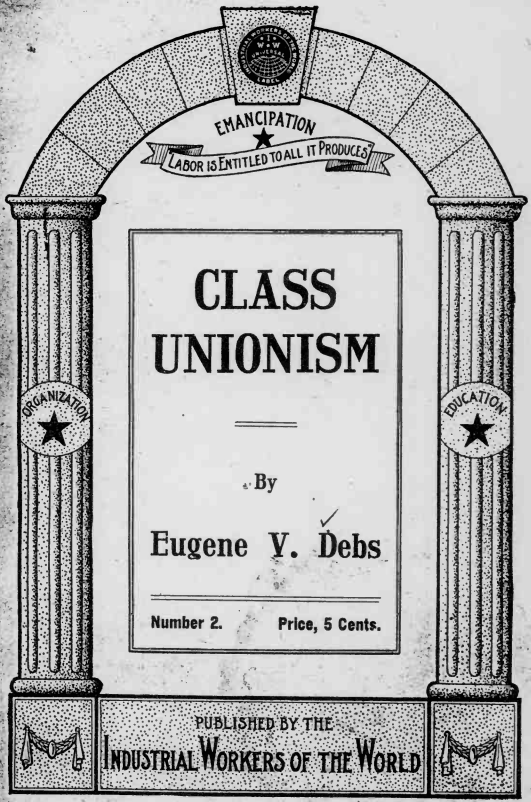

CLASS UNIONISM

By

Eugene V. Debs

Number 2. Price, 5 Cents.

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INDUSTRIAL WORKERS OF THE WORLD

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"Class Unionism"

Speech delivered by EUGENE V. DEBS at South Chicago, November 24, 1905.

The year now drawing to a close will be memorable in the annals of labor because of the organization of the Industrial Workers of the World.

For thirty years I have been connected with the labor movement. All of the years of my young manhood were devoted to the work of organizing my fellow-workingmen, that by the power of united effort they might do something to improve their condition as workers, promote their interests as citizens and advance their general welfare as men. There was a time when I believed that the trade union was in itself sufficient for this work. I have been compelled to revise my opinion and to conclude that something larger, more thorough and comprehensive in the way of organization is required to meet the demands of modern times.

The trade union, itself the product of industrial evolution, is subject to the laws of change, and the union that may have served some purpose a quarter of a century ago is now as completely out of date as the tools of industry that were then in use.

Now, I assume that most of you are more or less familiar with the history of the industrial development of the land; that you know in a general way that in the beginning of industrial society in the United States, when the tool with which work was done was a simple hand tool, made and used by an individual, the average workingman could look forward to the time when he should be an employer instead of an employe; that, having mastered his trade, he could grasp the few simple tools with which his work was done, virtually employ himself, own what he produced and enjoy the fruit of his labor.

At that time one man worked for another, not in the capacity of a wage worker as we understand that term

6-19-23

Industrial Workers of the World

HEADQUARTERS:
148 WEST MADISON STREET, CHICAGO.

CHAS. O. SHERMAN, - - General President.
W. E. TRAUTMANN, - Gen'l Secretary-Treasurer.

For information concerning the principles and form of organization, how to organize, etc., address the Secretary as above.

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today, but simply to learn his trade, and having become the master of this he was in a position to command most, if not all, his labor produced. It was when the simple tool of the hand laborer was supplanted by the machine and the workingman lost control of the tool with which he worked, that the modern industrial revolution had its beginning. The small employer became the capitalist and the employe became the wage worker; and there began the division of society into two distinct economic classes, and we have these classes before us today, in capitalist society, fully developed.

These two classes, consisting of relatively few capitalists who own tools in the form of great machines that they did not make and that they cannot use, and of a vast army of wage workers who did make these machines and who do use them, but who do not own them—these two classes, tool-owners and tool-users; that is to say, masters and slaves, exploiters and exploited; to put it into perfectly plain terms, robbers and robbed—these two economic forces whose interests ceaselessly clash, are pitted against each other in a mighty struggle for the mastery. It is because of this conflict of economic interests between these two classes into which modern society has been divided in the evolution of the capitalist system that we have the strike, the boycott, the lockout, the scab, the strike-breaker and slugger, and countless other evils that need not be enumerated here, all of which spring from the fundamental contradiction that inheres in capitalist society; that is, the individual ownership of the social tool of production and the individual appropriation of the social product of the working class.

Because of this, the capitalist who does no useful work has the economic power to take from a thousand or ten thousand workingmen all they produce, over and above what is required to keep them in working and producing order, and he becomes a millionaire, perhaps a multi-millionaire. He lives in a palace in which there is music and singing and dancing and the luxuries of all climes. He sails the high seas in his private yacht. He is the reputed "captain of industry" who privately owns a social utility, has great economic power, and commands the political power of the nation to protect his economic interests. He is the gentleman who furnishes

the "political boss" and his swarm of mercenaries with the funds with which the politics of the nation are corrupted and debauched. He is the economic master and the political ruler; and you workingmen are almost as completely at his mercy as if you were his property under the law. It is true that he has no title to your bodies; but he is the master of your jobs; he controls the employment upon which your lives depend; he has it in his power to decide whether you shall work or not; that is to say, whether you shall live or die. And the man who has the power of life and death over you, though he may not wear a crown or be hailed a king, is as completely your master and your ruler as if you were his chattels and subject to his commands under the laws of the state.

What is your status as a workingman today? You are not in the position of your grandfather, who could work with tools of his own, and who, when he produced something, was the master of it. Work is no longer done with that kind of tools. It is done with the most intricate and costly machinery, such as you have in this great steel plant here in South Chicago. That is the twentieth century tool of production. Work is now done with that kind of gigantic social agencies, made by you workingmen and used by you workingmen. Nobody but workingmen can make them; nobody but workingmen can use them. You have made all these marvelous machines and now your employment, your very lives depend upon your having access to them. But these large grown tools, made by labor and used by labor, are not owned by labor in the capitalist system, but belong to a capitalist or group of capitalists who live in New York or some other remote point; and when it suits their pleasure they can order their tool houses locked up and you workingmen locked out without consulting you and without a moment's warning. You have not a word to say. At such a time it is useless for you to leave here and look for work elsewhere, for when this mill closes down so do others. You are out of employment and you begin to suffer, and most of you don't know what the trouble is. You only know that you are no longer wanted at the mill; that workers are a drug on the market. With these wonderful tools with which you now

work, every few years you have produced so much that all of the markets at home and abroad are glutted, and the capitalists cannot sell what you have produced in such abundance, and so they stop their machinery, shut up their mills, lock out their "hands" and paralyze industry, and there you are, idle, helpless, hungry, hopeless, desperate. And these conditions will come upon you and become worse, no matter how well you are organized in your several trade unions; and this will continue as long as you workingmen allow the idle capitalists to own and control the tools of industry.

Has it ever occurred to you workingmen that if you could make these tools and use them you can also own them and produce wealth in plenty for yourselves?

The old trade union is organized on the basis of the identity of interests of capitalists and wage workers, and spends its time and devotes its energies to harmonizing these two classes; and it is a vain and hopeless task. When these interests can be even temporarily harmonized it is always in the interest of the capitalist class, and at the expense of the working class.

Most capitalists heartily approve the old form of trade unionism and encourage and liberally support it, for the very reason that this outgrown unionism does not truly represent and cannot actually express the economic interests of the working class.

The simple fact is that industrial conditions have undergone such a complete change that now the trade union, instead of uniting the workers, divides them, incites craft jealousy, breeds dissension and promotes strife —the very things capitalists desire; for so long as the working class is divided, the capitalists will be secure in their dominion of the earth and the seas, and the millions of toilers will remain in subjection.

Now, let me see if I can make myself perfectly clear upon this important point. In the railroad service there are various organizations of employes. Some of the departments are pretty thoroughly organized. The engineers, the firemen, conductors, brakemen, switchmen, telegraphers and some others are organized in their several craft unions. They have repeatedly tried to federate these organizations, so as to bring them into harmonious alliance with each other, but every such

attempt has failed. The selfish spirit of craft autonomy, that is, the jealousy of each particular branch to organize itself, establish its own petty supremacy and look out for itself, has made it impossible to federate these organizations. The members of these brotherhoods have increasing grievances and try to have them adjusted in the old way. The railroad corporations are always shrewd enough to enter into contractual relations with unions representing two or three or four departments, so that in every emergency they can always control these departments, while refusing increases, making reductions or discharging without cause employes in other departments of the service.

It has not been long ago since the union operators on the Missouri, Kansas & Texas directed their committee to call on the railroad officials for a small wage concession that had been granted by other systems. But the company, having contracts with its engineers and firemen, conductors and brakemen, peremptorily refused the request of the telegraphers, and about 1,300 of them went out on strike—quit the service of the company, as a union, to enforce their demands. What was the result? This large body of union workingmen who thus went out on strike to enforce a righteous claim all lost their jobs, every one of them. It was only a short time after they struck that I happened to go over the system. I met the strikers at various points and they told me the story of their defeat by their own fellow employes, who belonged to other unions. I understood it all before they told me. When the operators went out all the others remained at their posts, doing their usual work, and hauling and delivering scabs, wherever they were needed, to fill the places vacated by their fellow workers and fellow craft unionists. Union engineers and conductors took their train orders from scab operators; all the union men stood loyally by the company in its attack on one of their number, and so the operators were routed and scattered to the four winds and their union wiped from the system.

Here we have a perfect illustration of craft unionism in action. Another example is furnished by the Santa Fe system where but a few months ago the union machinists went out from one end of the system to the

other. The engineers and firemen, conductors and brakemen, and all the rest of them holding union cards, remained faithfully at work until a new set of machinists was employed and broken in, and now everything is running as smoothly as before.

Still another case of recent date is that of the Great Northern and the Northern Pacific systems, where the telegraph operators, after having failed in securing an adjustment of their grievances, went out on strike in a body, under orders from their union. What happened there? Just what had happened on the M., K. & T. The engineers, firemen, conductors and brakemen continued at their posts and discharged their duties with fidelity while their brother unionists, the operators, were mowed down and their places filled with scabs.

It is this that is taking place before our eyes every day. Here in Chicago you have witnessed the crushing defeat of one regiment after another of the army of organized labor. Indeed, during the last two or three years all the great strikes have failed. There has not been a single exception to relieve the rule, not one.

Now, when you see such things as these; when you see workingmen in craft unions go out on strike again and again and meet with constant defeat, does it not occur to you that there is something wrong with that kind of unionism? That that kind of unionism can be improved upon? Doesn't it occur to you that instead of fighting the capitalist enemy, who are always united, who always act together—that instead of fighting them by companies and regiments, the thing for us to do is to fight them as they fight us, in a united and solid force?

In this respect, if no other, we may well profit by the example set by the enemy. They unite, because they are conscious of their interests as a class. When the teamsters struck in this city last summer, the bankers subscribed $50,000 to defeat them. Now, the teamsters were not striking against the bankers; but the teamsters were striking against the capitalist class; and the bankers rushed loyally to the support of their class. And this brings an important fact to our attention, and that is that the struggle in which we are engaged today is a class struggle, and labor organization, to be of any

value to the working class, must be formed, not along craft lines, but along class lines.

The Industrial Workers is a working class organization, so all-inclusive, so comprehensive, that it will embrace every man and woman who works for a livelihood. Certain departments have been established and certain subdivisions have been made, so that the indentity of the trade, the autonomy of the craft may be preserved within the organization. Joining the Industrial Workers you take your place in your proper department. That department which represents your employment is organized, it has control of craft interests within its jurisdiction, so that, so far as craft autonomy is concerned, it adjusts itself within the general organization. Suppose you join the Industrial Workers as a switchman. You belong to the transportation department. You have a grievance, as a switchman, and the switchmen have charge of that grievance. The switchmen, organized in their respective department, having supervision of their craft affairs, seek to adjust that grievance. If they fail, then, instead of having to rely upon the switchmen alone in the support of that grievance, as now happens, they can call to their aid, not only all the switchmen, but the firemen, the conductors, the brakemen and engineers. They can call to their aid the boilermakers, the machinists and the blacksmiths, the shopmen and yardmen and office men; and, if it becomes necessary, they can command the combined support of all the organized workers of that entire system.

This is the kind of unionism that is required to deal effectively with the industrial situation of today.

Now, I am well aware that there is tremendous opposition to this organization. I know that upon every hand you hear it said that we already have plenty of organizations in the field, and that if they are not right we ought to set them right instead of starting a new one. This kind of reasoning may have some effect with the unthinking, but if you are a student of this great question you know that it is historically impossible for an old and outgrown and out-of-date labor organization to fit and adapt itself to embrace a new economic mission.

Reform unions rarely, if ever, become revolutionary bodies. It is admitted that there are thousands of unions in the field. These unions all have staffs of officers, whose name is legion and on the payroll. They all draw salaries and expense money. They don't want the working class united—that would mean an army of jobless leaders. You would be amazed if you knew how many of such union officials there are; and you would be still more amazed if you knew the aggregate amount of salary and expenses, millions of dollars, they draw every year. Now, they, like you, are looking out for their jobs. It is perhaps too much to expect them to discharge themselves. It is to their personal interest to keep the workers of the country divided into a thousand different organizations, so that a thousand different sets of officials will be required; so that a thousand sets of officials may draw salary from the scant wages of the working class. You may be told that the reason I am in favor of a new union is that I am a discredited labor leader and that I am trying to create a new job for myself. The truth is that if I had been inclined to serve the corporations instead of the workers I could have been in a high official position all these years. I could have been drawing a large salary and enjoying to the full the popularity of what is miscalled successful labor leadership.

You railroad men know that the late P. M. Arthur, grand chief of the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers, was called by the capitalist press a very successful labor leader. He was successful only in the sense that he served with far greater fidelity the corporations than he did the employes who paid his salary. I can remember the time when most of the present grand officers of the railroad brotherhoods denounced Mr. Arthur of the Engineers, because of his conservative and reactionary policy. All of these grand officers occupy today precisely the same position that he did, and which they condemned. They are now just as acceptable to the railroads as was Mr. Arthur. These corporations not only do not object to, but actually favor the leaders of these brotherhoods. In fact the corporation officials find these organizations very serviceable to them, and they would far rather have them than not. They could wipe

them out—and they would if they were a menace to them—but they will not do it. A little thing occurred the other day which will prove what I say. I do not know whether you happen to be aware of it but the Brotherhood of Engineers and the Brotherhood of Firemen on the Northern Pacific a few weeks ago, clashed in the matter of jurisdiction; and that matter is becoming more and more a plague to craft unionism. The grand officers of the two brotherhoods met at St. Paul, and they had quite a heated controversy, which had a most sensational climax, grand chief Warren Stone, of the engineers, hotly declaring to Grand Master Hannehan, of the firemen, that if it came to a "show-down" the engineers would remain at their posts and if the firemen went out on strike, the engineers would stay with the corporation and defeat the firemen. Now, the general manager of the Northern Pacific, had he been so inclined, could have encouraged these two craft unions to clash and wipe each other from the system. But the railway official was too wise to allow this to be done. He kindly interceded and told them that they ought not to quarrel with each other, that they should in truth love each other; and so he succeeded in saving the unions and restoring harmonious relations. The general manager appreciated the value of craft organization and proposed to preserve it for future use. Note again: the railroads grant annual passes to all the grand officers of these several organizations. Why? Because they love you railroad employes? Not at all; but because they are wise enough to understand their interests as corporations, as capitalists. So you find that the grand officers of craft unions ride free over the railroads; and when the several brotherhoods hold their conventions they are provided with free trains and Pullman cars and transported to the convention city and back again free of charge. This is one of the best investments the railroads could make. It costs them very little to furnish the delegates with free transportation; and every penny of it comes out of your earnings. They know that as you are now organized you can do little for yourselves but that you can do much for them. That is why they are so partial to the old organizations.

Let me point out one of the ways they use you when they need you. President Roosevelt is championing a measure that is to empower the Interstate Commerce Commission to fix the rates of railroads in certain cases. This measure is opposed by the railroad corporations. They do not want the government to interfere with their right to fix rates to suit themselves. What do they do? They send for the grand chiefs of the several brotherhoods and a conference is held. Then the press dispatches announce that the railroad and brotherhood officials are one in their opposition to the proposed rate-fixing legislation. A few days later a joint session is held of the standing committees of the several brotherhoods and they decide to stand by the railroads; and so they call upon President Roosevelt and serve notice upon him that they and the unions they represent are opposed to rate legislation. In this the unions appear for the railroads; the brotherhoods being the puppets of the corporations; and in the meantime the railroad magnates announce through the press that the employes are up in arms and will assert the political power of their unions in opposition to the rate-fixing measure. Not that there is anything of interest in rate legislation so far as you are concerned, but there is a vital point involved. When the railroads find it necessary to use the brotherhoods as breastworks, or as weapons with which to fight their battles, they issue their orders and the grand officers and unions fall in line to the tune "our interests are mutual and we must stand together." The unions then are made the active allies of the corporations in robbing and defying the people.

It is just because the corporations find these organizations exceedingly useful that they make petty concessions to them. I recognized this fact a number of years ago, and concluded then that what was needed for the employes was a real working class union embracing them all. The American Railway Union was organized. There are those present who were in the great strike of 1894, and you know how bitterly we were fought by the railroad corporations. You remember that they were not satisfied with merely defeating us—and they never would have beaten us had they not been in control of the government. But for this the victory would have been

won for the working class. They were defeated, completely; and when they realized this they had their 4200 thugs and thieves and convicts sworn in as deputy United States marshals, and they incited the riots and led the mobs, and then the courts issued their injunctions, while the capitalist press flashed the lurid reports over the wires that Chicago was at the mercy of a mob. The rest followed as a matter of course.

But they were not satisfied with mere defeat of the strike. They must crush the life out of the union. For two years after I was released by the courts—after being eighteen months in their custody—I was followed by their detectives, to prevent organization; and those who were reported as joining, or even as being friendly, were instantly discharged.

They defeated us, but they didn't vanquish us. We are stronger today than we ever were, and we are coming again. We are on the main track. We are not after a few pennies more a day this time. We are after the whole works.

Yes, for two years after I was finally released, they followed me from one end of the country to the other. They kept their detectives at my heels. And the order preceded me everywhere that the employes who had anything to do with Debs would be discharged. I concluded to go into those sections where the American Railway Union had not been organized, and where there had been no strike; and I started south. When I reached Louisville, the morning paper contained press despatches with startling headlines reporting a series of resolutions passed by the railroad employes of that section, saying: "Whereas, we are advised that E. V. Debs, the anarchist, of Chicago, is on his way south to disrupt the pleasant and harmonious relations that exist between the railroad employes and the companies; therefore, be it resolved, that we hereby serve notice on said anarchist, Debs, that we repudiate him and have nothing to do with him nor the anarchist organization he represents."

After these resolutions appeared I had a number of letters from the poor slaves who were employed upon these railroads, apologizing for the resolutions, and saying that the railroad officials had prepared the resolu-

tions, and had submitted them to the employes for their signatures, and then given them to the press. But even this was not sufficient. They discharged those who attended our meetings. They had their special men at the doors of meeting places to take the names of those who attended. They were determined to stamp out the last spark of its life. And they did succeed in destroying the organization, but they could not kill the spirit of the American Railway Union. That still lives. A far greater organization has come to take its place—as much greater as the American Railway Union was greater than the old union— and that organization is the Industrial Workers of the World. This great union is organized on the basis of the class struggle. It makes its appeal to the intelligence of the working class. It commands you workingmen to open your eyes and see for yourselves; to use your brains, and think for yourselves; to cultivate self-reliance and learn to depend upon yourselves. That is your only safety. You have been taught in the old union school to look to some leader; to depend upon some master. You have been trained to submit; to follow and obey orders. You have not developed your own capacity for thinking; you are lacking in the essentials of sturdy manhood. Many of you have become satisfied to blindly follow where others lead; and so you are often deceived, betrayed; and when the smoke of battle clears away you find yourselves defeated and out of jobs. You have often felt disheartened; you have quit the union in despair and disgust, and some of you have turned into scabs.

Thousands who once belonged to unions have become, not only non-union men, but scabs and strike-breakers, and in their desperation have turned upon the union and become its most bitter enemies. If you will call the roll of the strike-breakers who gather here in Chicago and elsewhere when union workers are out on strike, you will find that nearly all of them are ex-union men; men who once wore the badge of union labor, believed in it and marched proudly beneath the union banner.

What do you think of a unionism that creates an army for its own overthrow? There is something fundamentally wrong with that kind of unionism.

Long since, and after years of study and experience, I became convinced that the old unions are not fit to cope successfully with the enemy of the working class, and that a new organization was an imperative necessity.

In the Industrial Workers we have a union large enough to embrace us all; a union organized upon democratic principles recognizing the equal rights of all and extending its benefits equally to all.

Industrial unionism is the principle upon which the Industrial Workers is organized. This means actual unity of purpose and action. It means the economic solidarity of our class. It means that the grievance of one is the concern of all; and that from this time forward craft division is to be eliminated; that we are to get together and fight and win together for all. Industrial unionism means that such a plant as you have here in South Chicago, in which ten or twelve thousand men are employed, shall be thoroughly and efficiently organized.

What is the condition there today? You have innumerable unions represented there, but no unity. You have this great body of workers parceled out among scores of petty and purposeless unions, which are in ceaseless conflict with each other, jealous to preserve their craft identity. As long as this great army of workers is scattered among so many craft unions, it will be impossible for them to unite and act in harmony together. Craft unionism is the negation of solidarity. The more unions you have, the less unity; and here, in fact, you have no unity at all. In this state you can do nothing to improve your working condition. You are substantially at the mercy of the corporation.

What you need is industrial unionism and you will have it when you get together in the Industrial Workers.

When workingmen join the one economic working class organization that unites them upon the basis of the class struggle they can do something to better their working condition; not only will they have the economic power to do this, but they will represent a new and a vital force to which they are now total strangers—the revolutionary force that industrial unionism generates in the body.

There is something far different between a strike on the part of unions in which men are ignorant, blindly striking against something that they only vaguely understand, with no comprehension of the class struggle —there is something vastly different between that kind of a strike and the strike of a body of class-conscious, revolutionary workingmen, who, while they are striking for an immediate advantage, at the same time have their eyes clearly fixed upon the goal. And what is that goal? It is the overthrow of the capitalist system and the emancipation of the working class from wage-slavery.

The Industrial Workers is essentially an educational organization—and one of the vitally important things it will teach the workers is the complete operation and control of the industry in which they are employed. Have you ever thought about that? Has it ever been brought to your attention in craft unions?

I have already reminded you that you workingmen have made all the machinery there is in operation everywhere; that only you can use it. Now, why should not you own it? Why shouldn't you be your own employers? Why shouldn't you be the masters of your own jobs? Why depend upon the capitalist for a chance to work? Why clothe him with power to discharge and starve you at his will? Why engage him to take from you all you produce except enough to keep you at work? That is all that remains for you. You get a wage, and that wage suffices to keep you working for the capitalist. The tool you work with has got to be oiled, and you have got to be fed. The wage is simply your lubricant. The wage oils you and keeps you in working order. The capitalist doesn't intend that you shall ever be anything but his wage-slave. He would scout the suggestion that you are his equal. He doesn't associate with you. He belongs to another class; and the class to which he belongs is called the upper class. You, as a workingman, belong to the lower class. The working class has always been the lower class, and is today; and you will be the lower class as long as you are content to be that class. It is in your power to make yourselves the upper class, and in fact the only class. You are in an overwhelming majority. There are only a few capitalists as compared to you. And yet, they own practically everything and rule the land; and will keep on owning and ruling the land as long as you workingmen allow them to; and you will allow them as long as you persist in remaining divided in trade unions and being used against each other, instead of uniting and acting solidly with and for each other and against the capitalists.

The Industrial Workers is organized—and we declare it boldly—to fight the capitalist class. We want it distinctly understood that we claim nothing in common with that class. They have economic interests separate from and opposed to the economic interests of the working class. And we propose that the working class shall be organized economically and politically to retire the capitalist class from business.

Our business is to put the exploiters of labor out of business.

You, Mr. Workingman, don't need a capitalist; and if you think you do, it is because you are ignorant. It is because you don't understand your own interest. You don't need him. You imagine that he gives you a job; but he does nothing of the kind. You give him a job. You employ him to take from you what you produce; and he faithfully sticks to his job. Why, the capitalist could not exist a second without you. Can you imagine a capitalist without workingmen?

Capitalism is based upon the exploitation of the working class; and when the working class ceases to be exploited, there will no longer be any capitalists.

Now, while the capitalist could not exist without you, you would just begin to live without him. He is on your back; he rides you, and he rides you even when he rides in the automobile that you make. You make it. You never knew of a capitalist that ever made an automobile. The capitalist doesn't make it, but rides in it; the workingman does make it, but does not ride in it.

If it were not for you, the capitalist would have to walk, and if it were not for him, you would ride.

You don't need the capitalist; he is, in fact, a curse to you. What has the capitalist owner of a modern plant to do with its operation? Absolutely nothing. He might as well live in the moon, as far as you are concerned. There may be a group of them, but they have

nothing to do with the mill. They simply get what is produced there, because you will have it so. You are organized on that basis. In your moss-covered old unions you say "Our interests are mutual." Certainly, if you can stand this arrangement the capitalist can. He has no grievance. He does nothing and gets everything, and you do everything and get nothing.

If you can stand this he can; and if you don't put an end to it he won't. And why should he? And why shouldn't you? Mr. Workingman, you are a man. You ought not to be satisfied to be a mere wealth-producing animal. You have a brain, and you ought to develop it. You should aspire to rise above the animal plane. If you can work in a mill and produce wealth for a capitalist, who holds you in contempt, you can also work in that mill as a free man and produce wealth for yourself and your wife and family to enjoy. If not, why not?

It is upon this basis that the Industrial Workers is organized. It is for this supreme mission that the Industrial Workers has entered the field.

We have declared war upon the capitalist class, and upon the capitalist system. We are of the working class. We say: Arouse, you workingmen! It is in your power to put an end to this system. It is your duty to build up this great revolutionary economic organization of your class, to seize and take control of the tools with which you work, and make yourselves the masters instead of being the slaves of industry.

Wipe out the wage system, so that you can walk this earth free men!

Not only is it your right, not only have you the opportunity, but it is your solemn duty to do this, unless you are base enough to be guilty of treason to yourself and to your class.

Let me say to you, my fellow workers, that the hour has struck for a great change in the world of organized labor. Long enough have we been divided into quarreling factions. Long enough have we suffered ourselves to blindly and stupidly follow a leadership that has misled and deceived and betrayed. Long enough have we been clubbed by the police, and it may be pertinent to observe that when the club of a policeman descends

upon the head of a workingman he hears an echo of the vote he cast at the previous election.

It is only necessary for us to do a bit of serious reasoning on our own account to satisfy ourselves that the Industrial Workers is the only working class organization in the field. It requires but little intelligent reflection to satisfy ourselves that we have got to build up this organization, unless we have given up in the struggle and succumbed to defeat and despair. Is it possible that we could for a moment make up our minds that we and those who are to come after us are forever doomed to wage slavery? The very suggestion is abhorrent to every worker with a spark of manhood, with a drop of manly blood coursing in his veins. Why, you men, you workingmen, are more than the salt of this earth. Without you society would perish. Society does not need the idle capitalists. They are parasites. They are worse than useless. They simply take what you make, leaving you in poverty; thousands of you idle; if not now, when the times become hard. And every few years the times become hard in the capitalist system, for reasons you can easily understand, but I have not the time to fully explain this evening.

A panic comes, industry is paralyzed, because with machinery you can produce so much more than your paltry wage will allow you to consume. You make all things in great abundance, but you do not consume them. You can only consume that part of your product which your wage, the price of your labor power, will buy. If you cannot consume what you produce, it follows that in time there is bound to be overproduction, because the few capitalists cannot absorb the large surplus. The market is glutted, business comes to a standstill and mills and factories shut down. At such a time Chicago is hit, and hit hard; and you workingmen find yourselves out of employment, a drug on the market. Nobody wants your labor power, because it cannot be utilized at a profit to the capitalist who owns the tool, and when he cannot use your labor power at a satisfactory profit to himself he doesn't buy it. And if he doesn't buy your labor power you are idle, and when you are idle you don't draw any wages, and you can't buy groceries and pay rent; you can't buy clothing and shoes, and begin

to look seedy and shabby. By degrees you become a vagrant and a wanderer and lose what little self-respect you had. And then you hear that your wife has been evicted, and that is a thing that happens every day in the week. Your child is now upon the street and your former cottage home is now deserted and you start out on what proves to be a never ending journey. The road you are now traveling stretches wearily on, and from the hedges bark the dogs of civilization. You are a tramp.

Are there not thousands and thousands of tramps all over this country today? There were none half a century ago. There is a great army of them now. They have been recruited in capitalist society; they are the products of the capitalist system.

A man is out of work a good while and he gets hungry; he still has a little self-respect and steals rather than beg. That is how men become tramps and thieves and criminals; that is why we have an army of tramps; that is why all the penitentiaries are crowded; why the insane asylums are overflowing and why thousands commit suicide. All these shocking evils are the outgrowth of the capitalist system, to which the Industrial Workers proposes to put an everlasting end.

If you think that these horrors ought to be; if you, as a workingman, think that you ought to have a master —just as the ignorant chattel slave on the plantation in the South used to think that he had to have a master to rob him of what he produced—if you think that you are so helpless that you would die unless you had a master to give you a job and take from you all except just enough to keep you working for him; if you think that workingmen ought to fight each other; if you think that unity, the unity of the working class, would be a bad thing for the working class; if you think that your interest is identical with the interest of the capitalist who robs you; if you think that you ought to be in slavish submission to the capitalist who does nothing and gets what you produce; if you think that, then certainly you ought to stay in the old trade union and keep out of the Industrial Workers.

But if you have a bit of intelligence, just enough to realize that you are a workingman and that, as a work-

ingman, you are a human being; if you are capable of understanding that you have the inherent power of self-development, that the brain you have can be developed so that you can think clearly for yourself; if you will use that intelligence just enough to satisfy yourself that you ought to be the master of your own job; then, instead of being a wage slave you will soon be a man among men, and if you have intelligence enough to conceive and to express that thought then, let me say to you, a revolutionary light will be kindled in your eyes and you will feel the thrill of a new-born joy, and for the first time in your life you will stand perfectly erect and know what it is to be self-reliant and touch elbows with your fellow-workers throughout the world.

Remember that no matter who or what a worker may be, if he works for wages he is in precisely the same economic position that you are. He is in your class; he is your brother; he is your comrade.

As an individual worker you cannot escape from wage-slavery. It is true that one in ten thousand wage workers may become a capitalist, to be pointed out as a man worth a million who used to be a clerk, but he is the exception that proves the rule. The wage worker in the capitalist system remains the wage worker.

There is no escape for you from wage-slavery by yourself, but while you cannot alone break your fetters, if you will unite with all other workers who are in the same position that you are; that is, if—instead of being bound up in a little union of a score, or a hundred, or thousand, that is almost as helpless to do anything for you as you are to do anything by yourself—if you will join the organization that represents your whole class, you can develop the power that will achieve your freedom and the equal freedom of all.

The working man who does this is a missionary in the field of sound working class organization; he wears the badge of the Industrial Workers; he has a new idea of unionism. Instead of being satisfied with ancient, out-of-date, reactionary methods, he will have the advanced and progressive ideas of industrial revolutionists. That is to say, he will understand that when the workers are united in one great economic organization and one great political organization; when they strike together

and vote together, they can put their class in power in every council, in every legislature and in the national congress; they can abolish the capitalist system, take over the industries to themselves and rule the land forevermore.

For this great change the workers must prepare themselves through organization and education. Were it to come today it would result in collapse. It would mean a catastrophe, and why? Because if, for example, the Illinois Steel Works were turned over to the workers today they would not be fitted, trained, drilled, equipped for the operation of this mammoth industrial enterprise.

The Industrial Workers proposes to first unite all workers within one organization, classified in the various departments representing their several trades and occupations, to bring them all into harmonious economic relations with each other. The next thing is to co-ordinate themselves within their several industries with an eye to operating these industries when they secure control of them. That is the central function of the new union, and by far the most important one.

The old union never makes any reference to industrial self-control, because so far as the old union is concerned wage-slavery is to prevail forever.

The Industrial Workers declares that it is organized to put an end to the wage system, to free the workers, to make them the masters of the mills and other plants in which they are employed. In order to fit them to operate these enterprises in their own interests when they are turned over to them, it is necessary that they undergo a thorough process of industrial education.

So that, after you join the Industrial Workers, when you go to your work in the morning, you will not be tied to your task blindly; you will have a thought about your relation to your fellow-workingmen in all other departments. You will understand your part in the enterprise, and your connection with and relation to the whole. You will help to fit your fellows for the new function, so that when the hour strikes you will be perfectly trained and ready to take control of industry and operate the productive enterprises in the interests of the people. To me nothing could be simpler.

Don't you think we are capable of effecting this change? I do. I not only think it, I know it. And I know it is inevitable.

Upon the one hand the capitalists are combining. It will be but a short time until practically all the lands, railroads, telegraphs, steel mills, sugar refineries, breweries, and all other great establishments will belong to a single syndicate, controlled by a few capitalists. But while they are combining and centralizing their capital, we are organizing the workers that they may act together, economically and politically, and possibly in other ways before the struggle is ended and the victory won.

In the Industrial Workers they will vote as they strike, and strike as they vote—all together.

Do you know what I expect to see? I expect to see a general strike in the city of Chicago. I would rather see it here than in any other city in America; than any other in the world.

The capitalists are drunken with their power. They are running things to suit themselves, and they are going to keep the working class in subjection just as the remnants of the Indians are kept on their reservations out on the plains. And if you object they are so completely in control that they will club you, or they will jail you, or kill you if necessary.

I want to see the time when the workers of Chicago will be so thoroughly organized in their economic capacity that they can quit work and paralyze industry in Chicago for just twenty-four hours, and when they are organized well enough to do that they will have every capitalist in the city and nation suing for peace. When they are organized well enough to do that they will secure more economic concessions in five minutes than they can get in five years striking and boycotting along the old trade union lines.

How is it now? Why, the union butcher workmen go out on strike and they strike bravely and loyally to the bitter end. But all other union men remain at work until the butcher workmen are used up.

The capitalists are rich; the loss of a few hundreds or thousands of dollars doesn't hurt them, because they get it all back again. So they can wait until this corps

of the working class army is defeated and its stanchest supporters are out of jobs. Many of these quit the union; it is no use. They tried the union and are disgusted with it, and in all probability some of them will stay at work in the next strike and help defeat the union.

Next comes the strike of the Chicago machinists, and that lasts a long time. All their fellow unionists remain at work. Here we have a large body of machinists engaged in a life and death struggle and they hold out wonderfully well. They levy assessments on all other machinists who keep at work to help these strikers in idleness for many weary months and then at last, when all the resources are exhausted and the men are on the point of starvation, they have got to surrender, and they go back defeated, and the open shop system is established, and the union, so far as any usefulness to the machinist is concerned, is practically wiped out of existence.

What good has the machinists' union done to these machinists? It collects high dues and pays high salaries. Hundreds of thousands of dollars are contributed by the workers with which they buy their own defeat. Now, defeat would be bad enough if it came about free of charge, but if you have to pay $174,000 for it, as the official reports of the machinists show, it is time you were doing a little thinking on your own account.

Mr. James O'Connell is at the head of the machinists' union, and he is also a labor lieutenant of the capitalist class. He sits at the same banqueting table with the capitalists and is hand in glove with August Belmont—the employer of James Farley, the professional strike-breaker, who, when you go on strike, steps in and gets as much pay in a day as you get in a year.

You can hardly blame the men who get disgusted with unions as they are run in Chicago. Not alone Mr. O'Connell, but Mr. Mitchell, president of the Mine Workers; Mr. Gompers, president of the American Federation of Labor, and other pure and simple union leaders are in economic tune with the master class, and are held up as model labor leaders by capitalist newspapers. Periodically these model leaders go to New York to attend a love feast between capitalists and wage workers, or rather between capitalists and leaders of wage workers.

You are only the common herd. They don't have anything to do with you, and they don't need to have anything to do with you. They deal with your leaders and between them they fix things, and all you have to do is to work and put up the money and they will attend to the rest.

Last fall, a year ago, when I was in New York, there came near being a strike on the Interborough railway lines. The employes had been outraged by the management of the Interborough under an agreement that had been shamefully violated by the company. They threatened to go out on strike. It happened to be a national election year, and under the pressure that was brought to bear upon him, Mr. Belmont, the president of the system, on the eve of the election settled with the men and averted the strike. I made a speech in New York that night and made the prediction in that speech that the settlement was temporary and made for political effect, and that soon after the election was over the corporation would begin methodically to violate the spirit of the agreement and goad the men to strike. And so it came to pass. After the election was over the corporation renewed its offensive tactics until at last 6,000 of the men went out on strike. And now we behold an exhibition of the impotency, if not the crime of outgrown unionism. When these 6,000 men went out on strike August Belmont already had James Farley and his army of professional strike-breakers on the ground; had them there weeks in advance. And they were getting their pay, $5 a day and expenses, while Farley got an advance payment, said to have been $10,000. August Belmont, the president of the Interborough, was photographed with Farley, the strike-breaker. They were pictured side by side; they occupied the first page of the New York newspapers; they were represented as the modern strike-breakers, August Belmont, the capitalist, and James Farley, his mercenary minion.

The strike was soon defeated and the places of the men filled with scabs.

The union men who were in the power houses, who could and who should have shut off the power, kept those great plants in operation. They said, "We are in sympathy with you and would like to help you, but we cannot

go out on strike without violating our contract." And so, to preserve the sanctity of their craft contract, they cut the throats of their 6,000 fellow unionists, virtually scabbing on them, so far as the effect of their action was concerned. These union men might as well have stepped out of the power houses and taken the places that were vacated by the strikers.

Now comes the closing chapter of this story, the blackest of all. A little while after the 6,000 union men had gone out on strike and had been defeated by strike-breakers under Farley, the lieutenant of Belmont, the Civic Federation holds its banquet. August Belmont attended this banquet, being the president of the Federation. So also did the labor leaders. In their regular order came President Gompers, President Mitchell, President O'Connell, President Duncan and the rest of the presidents. They surrounded the banqueting board and sat and feasted and laughed and made joy together. The labor question was speedily settled, so far as they were concerned.

What do you think of the labor leader who would sit down, side by side at the same banqueting board, with August Belmont, fresh from the field upon which he had slaughtered 6,000 union men? Do you think that a true union leader, a man whose heart was with the working class, could feast and make common cause with a capitalist who had just thrust the dagger of assassination into the heart of his union? Do you think that a real labor leader would fraternize with one whose hands were dripping with the blood of union labor?

I say that a labor leader who attends that kind of a banquet and who greets as an associate an arch-enemy of labor, is himself a Belmont at heart and the foe of the working class.

You may feel assured that there is no officer of the Industrial Workers who will ever banquet with the Civic Federation.

Could you imagine Charles O. Sherman—who has given his life to the working class—could you imagine him consorting with Belmont? Could you imagine Trautmann—the very incarnation of the revolutionary spirit of the working class—could you imagine Trautmann attending a banquet of the Civic Federation,

in full fellowship with the men who live out of the blood of the working class? It is unimaginable. They would scorn to do it; they would consider this an act of basest treason to their class.

In closing, I appeal to you, as workingmen, to think for yourselves; to cut loose from those who have misled and betrayed you; to close up the ranks and unify your forces. I appeal to you to ally yourselves with the economic organization of your class; I appeal to you to join the union that truly represents you, the union that unites you, the union in which you can stand shoulder to shoulder, regardless of your occupation; the union in which you will move forward, step by step, marching to the inspiring music of the new emancipation. I appeal to you to declare yourselves here and now, to be for once true enough to yourselves to join the only industrial union that is absolutely true to you.

And if you join this union in sufficient numbers, if you build up this union and give it the power it ought to have—if you will rally to the standard of this revolutionary union—then, as certain as I stand before you, you will carry that banner to victory. Then the workers will be the sovereign citizens, the rulers of this earth. They will build houses and live in them; they will plant vineyards and enjoy the fruits thereof. The labor question will have been settled, and the working class emancipated from the fetters of wage-slavery, will begin the real work of civilizing and refining the human race.

Eugene V. Debs

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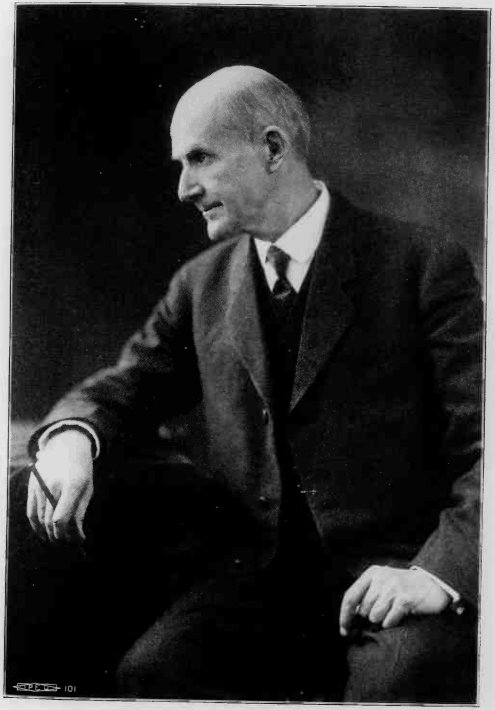

Eugene V. Debs

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